

Leegate Redevelopment Working Group Position paper – June 2012

The Group welcomes the fact that, after many years of decline, there are firm proposals afoot to redevelop the Leegate Shopping Centre. Whilst we accept there may be need for a large retailer, we have serious concerns about the current proposals which, we believe, will not deliver the wished-for mix of retail, housing and other activities in a vibrant community hub.

The Group calls on St Modwen to rethink its plans for Leegate to take full advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a centre that delivers both St Modwen's commercial goals and residents' broader community and social aspirations. The Group's concerns focus on:

1. The overwhelming scale of the proposed superstore, leading to the loss of much-valued public space in the shape of the passageway and reduction in the size of the square.
2. The failure to include a meaningful amount of housing.
3. The traffic impact of a second superstore (alongside Sainsbury's) at Lee Green crossroads.
4. The failure to devise a comprehensive scheme for the whole site with the result that the most prominent feature, the corner office/retail block will remain (though with a modern cladding).

The Group's views are, we believe, underpinned by Council planning policies as set down in Lewisham's Core Strategy Development Plan Document (adopted June 2011) and the Leegate Centre section of the Council's Site Allocations Document. (Page and paragraph numbers quoted *in bold italics* below all refer to the **Core Strategy Document**.)

1. Scale of the proposed superstore.

The proposed superstore is so large that it will result in the loss of the present passageway between Burnt Ash Road and the public square, while the square itself will lose about a third of its present area. The loss of these spaces and links will destroy the coherence of Leegate, creating two separate areas of activity – the car-borne shoppers visiting the superstore and pedestrians shopping on the Burnt Ash Road side of the Centre. Sainsbury's failure to provide safe and convenient pedestrian links with Leegate has contributed to the Centre's decline over the past 20 years. We do not wish to see this mistake repeated

This runs counter to policies expressed in

4. Building a sustainable community 4A Sustainable movement 6.103 (p65): The strategy seeks to create a permeable, memorable and sustainable place that is based on a network of high quality streets, spaces and open spaces. Connectivity improvements to and throughout each district centre will be prioritised where development opportunities arise and where the Council can play a lead role.

It also runs counter to policies in

3. Climate changes and environmental management 3C Open space and biodiversity (p65):
The emphasis within the District town centres will be to protect the existing open spaces from development and to promote environmental improvements which enhance the role of the centre and its attractiveness for those who shop there and use other services and facilities. Publicly-accessible open or civic space will need to be provided where major development is proposed.

It also fails to meet the objectives of:

Spatial Policy 3 District Hubs (p63) Lee Green 1. Improve civic space and facilitate a more intensive mixed use development on the shopping centre site to strengthen its role and function. 2. Improve the connectivity between the shopping centre and the supermarket (i.e., Sainsbury's) sites.

Thus, it would be difficult to argue, within these objectives, that the building of a second large food/non-food superstore, would provide and add to the variety of shopping needs at Lee Green crossroads.

This runs counter to policies expressed in:

7.33 (p90) Planning Policy Statement 4. Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth outlines the Government's key objectives for town centres... This includes enhancing consumer choice by providing a range of shopping, leisure and local services, which allow genuine choice to meet the needs of the entire community and particularly socially excluded groups ... The Council should ... manage change in town centres, define the network and a hierarchy of centres, each performing their appropriate role to meet the needs of their catchment, and adopt a pro-active plan-led approach.

2. The failure to include a meaningful amount of housing.

The Group is concerned that St. Modwen's housing proposals include only a small number of flats to replace those lost in the redevelopment. The scale of housing need in London and the Council's own plans to increase housing provision, including affordable housing, throughout the borough suggests the need for a more generous housing provision at Leigate. The Group believes that partnering approaches could and should be made to some of the Housing Associations currently developing provision in Lewisham.

Paragraph **7.1 Housing Provision** states in the **Overview 7.6 (p81) The provision of housing is a key priority and pressure for the borough. Lewisham's housing policy implements national and regional policy and responds to existing and forecast local housing need and population growth.**

Core Strategy Policy 1 Housing provision, mix and affordability (p82) states:

- 3. The Council will seek the maximum provision of affordable housing with a strategic target for 50 per cent affordable housing from all sources.**
- 4. Contributions to affordable housing will be sought on sites capable of providing 10 or more dwellings.**

Paragraph 5.5 Core Strategy Objective 2; Housing provision and distribution (p36) refers to the provision of new homes of which **3,190 will be distributed across the remainder of the borough.**

Failure to provide for more homes at Leegate runs counter to policies expressed in the section.

1. Housing Provision (p63) 6.90 The District Hubs have different characteristics and opportunities for redevelopment. Mixed-use redevelopment within the town centres will generally be encouraged with an appropriate retail or service use on the ground floor and housing on upper floors. Ground floor uses will be expected to contribute to the economic vitality and viability of the centre.

6.91 Forest Hill, Lee Green and Sydenham have site opportunities that can provide for appropriately designed mixed use development, ensuring the conservation areas are preserved or enhanced.

3. Traffic impact.

We have not seen a traffic management plan for the crossroads around Leegate, but are concerned that a second large superstore will create traffic volumes that cannot easily be absorbed by the existing road network. This would add considerably to atmospheric pollution. We fear that any increase in road space to cater for additional traffic would come at the expense of pedestrian areas and green space. Any traffic plan would have to comply with the following policies:

Core Strategy Policy 14. Sustainable movement and transport (p116)

Para 3. Travel plans will need to be submitted which meet or exceed the Dept of Transport's thresholds for transport assessment and TfL guidance.

Para 4. The Council will work with TfL, Network Rail and other partners to address the cumulative impact of development by enabling more effective management of traffic and improving the environment for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users.

4. A comprehensive scheme for the whole site.

We are concerned that St Modwen's proposal to retain the existing corner block with its clumsy massing and unattractive facades will detract from the overall scheme. Despite the developer's plan to re-clad these buildings, we do not believe a satisfactory solution is possible. The corner site sets the tone for entire shopping centre. It needs very careful treatment if any improvements on the south end of the site are not to be negated by the retention of this lumpy and unsatisfactory structure. Retaining the corner site constrains development options elsewhere to the detriment of the public spaces and the coherence of the whole. For example, redevelopment of the corner site could create the opportunity for a new public square at the crossroads, strengthening Leegate's connection with existing retail outlets.

At present, Lee Green is as described in:

6.87 (p61): Lee Green is the eighth largest of the nine major and district town centres within the borough. It is dominated by a single-storey supermarket and the 1960s Leegate Shopping Centre, both of which impact negatively on the coherence, legibility and identity of the town centre.

This is an unattractive picture. To remedy this, the Group urges the Council to apply the policies referred to above and those outlined in:

Spatial Policy 3. District Hubs (p62). These state that:

District Hubs will be reinforced as places which will sustain a diversity of uses and activities appropriate to each hub's function and location ... the focus will be to build and maximise the uniqueness and potential of each place. New development will maintain and enhance the status of each town centre and improve its vitality and viability, attractiveness, accessibility and overall environment. Importantly, conservation areas will continue to be protected and development will need to preserve or enhance their quality and character.

We are aware that St Modwen has been seeking an anchor tenant for Leegate for some time. However, the Centre has been in St Modwen's ownership for 20 years. We do not think it should leap at the first substantial proposal to occupy the site. St Modwen points to a 74 per cent favourable response to its recent drop-in consultation. We believe this response reflected local residents' wish for redevelopment of the Centre as much as their approval of St Modwen's outline plans for a large superstore.

In summary

The Group believes that the "anchor" retailer should not be on such a massive scale, reducing the public open space and providing little interface with the smaller units. Further, the bleak "face" of Leegate on the Eltham Road frontage would remain uninviting and undermine the overall scheme. A scheme is needed that would create the opportunity to meet the community's wishes and Council's policies for a larger housing component, a more varied mix of retail outlets and the retention of high quality public spaces that provide connectivity within the Centre and outside to surrounding retail and residential areas.